

AMMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-14 (Canceled)

Claim 15 (Currently Amended): A nonwoven composite structure comprising: a plurality of layers of nonwoven fiber material of needle punched construction comprising a plurality of intermingled staple fibers, at least a portion of said layers of nonwoven fiber material being bonded together by one or more discrete layers of adhesive extending in substantially sandwiching relation between said layers of nonwoven fiber material, the nonwoven composite being characterized by a thickness of not less than about 6.3 mm and being further characterized by a density of not less than about 0.1 grams per cubic centimeter said layers of nonwoven fiber material being further bonded together by the forced extension of fiber elements substantially across at least a portion of said layers of adhesive between adjacent layers of said nonwoven fiber material such that mechanical entanglement is established between adjacent layers of said nonwoven fiber material.

Claim 16 (Original): The invention according to claim 15, wherein said nonwoven composite is characterized by a density in the range of about 0.20 to about 0.55 grams per cubic centimeter

Claim 17 (Original): The invention according to claim 15, wherein the staple fibers comprising said nonwoven fiber material are selected from the group consisting of; polyester fibers, acrylic fibers, acetate fibers, wool fibers, aramid fibers, polypropylene fibers, rayon fibers and blends thereof and wherein said staple fibers are characterized by a linear density in the range of about 2 denier to about 15 denier have an average length in the range of about 50 mm to about 105 mm.

Claim 18 (Original): The invention according to claim 15, wherein said one or more layers of adhesive comprise a dry adhesive.

Claim 19 (Original): The invention according to claim 18, wherein said dry adhesive comprises a meltable scrim fabric.

Claim 20 (Original):. The invention according to claim 18, wherein said one or more layers of adhesive is activated in a selected geometric pattern such that a discontinuous bonding pattern is formed between adjacent layers of nonwoven fiber material.

Claim 21 (Original): The invention according to claim 18, wherein said one or more layers of adhesive comprises a scrim fabric of spun bonded construction.

Claims 22-24 (Canceled)

Claim 25 (New)      A nonwoven composite structure comprising: a plurality of layers of nonwoven fiber material of needle punched construction comprising a plurality of intermingled staple fibers, at least a portion of said layers of nonwoven fiber material being bonded together by a plurality of discrete layers of adhesive extending in substantially sandwiching relation between said layers of nonwoven fiber material, the nonwoven composite being characterized by a thickness of not less than about 8 mm and being further characterized by a density of not less than about 0.1 grams per cubic centimeter said layers of nonwoven fiber material being further bonded together by the forced extension of fiber elements substantially across at least two or more of said layers of adhesive such that mechanical entanglement is established between three or more of said layers of nonwoven fiber material.